

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 01150 01 OF 02 280009Z

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 EUR-25 NIC-01 SIL-01 LAB-06 DRC-01

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P 272315Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2255

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 1150

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, GT

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL SCENE

REF: GUATEMALA'S A-33

FOLLOWING ARE FIRST THREE ITEMS BI-WEEKLY
POLITICAL REVIEW TRANSMITTED IN ENTIRETY IN REFAIR:

SUMMARY: IN LAST TWO WEEKS OF 1974 ELECTION CAMPAIGN
ALL THREE PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS AND THEIR TEAMS
HAVE STEPPED UP STRONG, FORCEFUL CAMPAIGNING. COALITION
CONTINUES TO APPEAR TO HAVE A SLIGHT EDGE, BUT OPPOSITION
FRONT AND PR ARE BOTH STILL VERY MUCH IN THE RUNNING.
IN LAST TWO WEEKS, FRONT HAS CONCENTRATED ITS ATTACKS
AGAINST GOG ON ALLEGED OFFICIAL PLAN TO FRUSTRATE A
RIOS MONTT VICTORY THROUGH MASSIVE FRAUD. PR BEGAIN
CAMPAIGN ASKING VOTERS TO REJECT BOTH COMMUNISMO AND
CONTINUSIMO AND VOTE FOR PAIZ NOVALES. IN LAST WEEK
COALITION MOUNTED ALL-OUT, MUDSLINGING CAMPAIGN AGAINST
FRONT, ACCUSING IT OF BEING COMMUNIST. FRONT REJECTED
CHARGE FORCEFULLY, BUT HAS PROBABLY BEEN HURT BY IT.
MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL RUBIO MADE TWO MAJOR PUBLIC
STATEMENTS OVER LAST TWO WEEKS IN WHICH HE AFFIRMED ARMED
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PAGE 02 GUATEM 01150 01 OF 02 280009Z

FORCE IN POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND INTENTION TO RESPECT

VERDICT OF POPULAR WILL ON MARCH 3. GOG BACKED OFF FROM MOVE TO CLOSE DOWN EIGHT ANTI-GOVERNMENT RADIO STATIONS, WHILE IN LABOR AFFAIRS, WORKERS AT HEALTH MINISTRY HOSPITALS IN GUATEMALA CITY BEGAN WORK STOPPAGES TO PRESS FOR HIGHER WAGES. ON SECURITY FRONT, POLITICALLY RELATED VIOLENCE INCREASED, BUT POLITICAL OBSERVERS ON ALL SIDES BELIEVE IT TO BE AT A MUCH LOWER LEVEL THAN IT WAS IN 1970. END SUMMARY.

1. POLITICAL CLIMATE

THE CAMPAIGN: "FRAUD" AS ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO CLOSE, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND FOLLOWERS HAVE STEPPED UP ACTIVITIES IN FINAL APPEALS TO VOTERS. OPPOSITION FRONT KEPT UP BARRAGE OF TELEVISION APPEARANCES IN GUATEMALA CITY EMPHASIZING PAST THEMES OF GOVERNMENT INEPTNESS. THEY HAVE ALSO GIVEN SPECIAL NEW EMPHASIS TO PREVIOUSLY AIRED CHARGES THAT GOG IS PLANNING WIDE-SCALE FRAUD TO GUARANTEE VICTORY. COALITION FRONT PLANNED TELEVISION EXPOSE OF SUPPOSED FRAUD ON FEBRUARY 19 FEATURING RIOS WITH FUENTES MOHR, DE LEON SCHLOTTER, AND COLOM ARGUETA, BUT WERE PREVENTED FROM APPEARING BY GOG. FOLLOWING DAY, FRONT DENOUNCED BOTH BLOCKING OF TV SPEECH AND FRAUD, WHICH IT SAID GENERALLY CONSISTED OF FACILITATING MULTIPLE VOTING BY COALITION FAITHFUL. ON FEBRUARY 23, FRONT HELD RALLY IN GUATEMALA CITY WHICH APPEARED TO BE LARGEST SO FAR IN CAMPAIGN. AT RALLY, FRONT SPEAKERS DENOUNCED FRAUD AND CALLED ON SUPPORTERS TO TAKE TO STREETS ON EVENING OF MARCH 3 TO CELEBRATE VICTORY AND TO BE PREPARED TO PROTEST A STOLEN ELECTION. RIOS TOLD AMBASSADOR PRIVATELY ON FEBRUARY 26 HE WOULD ACCEPT HONEST DEFEAT, BUT WOULD "PUT HIMSELF IN THE CENTER OF THE PEOPLE" AND DEMAND NEW ELECTIONS OR VICTORY IF HE WERE DEFEATED BY GROSS FRAUD.

PR CANDIDATE PAIZ NOVALES HAS ALSO PUBLICLY DENOUNCED ALLEGED GOG POLITICAL CHICANERY, PROTESTING GOG OBSTRUCTION OF PR CAMPAIGNING BUT ALSO COMPLAINING ABOUT ELECTORAL REGISTRY REFUSAL TO GIVE VOTING CREDENTIALS TO PR FAITHFUL. IN PRIVATE, PAIZ TOLD AMBASSADOR ON FEBRUARY 25 THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT GOG WAS PLANNING EXTENSIVE FRAUD AND CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 GUATEM 01150 01 OF 02 280009Z

THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY COMPLAINED ABOUT THIS TO COALITION CANDIDATE LAUGERUD. ACCORDING TO PAIZ, LAUGERUD PROFESSED IGNORANCE OF FRAUD PLANS AND PROMISED TO PUT STOP TO THEM. IN PUBLIC, COALITION FIGURES HAVE RESPONDED TO ACCUSATIONS BY ASSERTING THAT FRONT'S RECOURSE TO CRYING FRAUD ONLY SHOWS THAT IT EXPECTS TO BE DEFEATED.

COMMENT: ALTHOUGH GOG HAS DENIED FRAUD CHARGE, WE ARE

SURE THAT SOME INTENTIONAL IRREGULARITIES ARE INDEED PLANNED. GUATEMALAN ELECTIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY SOME "SWEETENING OF POT" BY INCUMBENT GOVERNMENTS, BUT OPPOSITION VICTORIES IN 1966 AND 1970 HAVE SHOWN THAT THIS TOOL IS NOT NECESSARILY AN EFFECTIVE ONE. WHOLESAL, UNDETECTABLE FRAUD WOULD BE MOST DIFFICULT FOR ANY GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT. IF, HOWEVER, A GOVERNMENT VICTORY IS WON ON MARCH 3 BY A NARROW MARGIN, OR IF GROSS FRAUD IS INVOLVED, FRONT MAY WELL ATTEMPT TO CREATE PUBLIC DISTURBANCES TO PROTEST "STOLEN ELECTION". PAIZ TOLD US THAT HE WILL PROTEST GROSS GOVERNMENT FRAUD IF IT OCCURS, EVEN IF HE ENDS UP THIRD, BEHIND RIOS. HE SAID HE WOULD ADVOCATE LETTING RIOS TAKE OFFICE IF HE WON. END COMMENT

THE CAMPAIGN: "COMMUNISM": BEGINNING IN EARLY FEBRUARY WITH ITS CAMPAIGN OF RADIO SPOT ADS(SEE A-27), PR HAS ASKED VOTERS TO REJECT COMMUNISMO AND CONTINUISMO AND VOTE FOR PAIZ. COALITION FIGURES SUBSEQUENTLY LAUNCHED OWN LOW-LEVEL MUDSLINGING CAMPAIGN AGAINST FRONT, PICTURING IT AS COMMUNIST. NEWSPAPER ADS SHOWING DCG SYMBOL (A WHITE STAR ON A GREEN FIELD) SUPERIMPOSED WITH RED HAMMER AND SICKLE WARN VOTERS NOT TO FALL INTO COMMUNIST TRAP BY SUPPORTING RIOS. ADS ALSO JUXTAPOSED PHOTOS OF LENIN AND STALIN WITH RIOS AND COLOM ALONG WITH QUOTES FROM SOVIET LEADERS. IN ADDITION, WALLS ALL OVER TOWN HAVE APPEARED PAINTED WITH SIGNS SAYING "RIOS-COMMUNISTA," WITH "R" IN RIOS BEING FORMED BY HAMMER AND SICKLE. IN RECENT SPEECHES, LAUGERUD HAS CHARACTERIZED 1974 ELECTIONS AS CONTEST BETWEEN "SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY" AND WARNED VOTERS THAT SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION WILL BRING "SOVIET-STYLE DICTATORSHIP."

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 01150 02 OF 02 272359Z

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 EUR-25 NIC-01 SIL-01 LAB-06 DRC-01

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P 272315Z FEB 74
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2256

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 1150

FRONT REACTED VIGOROUSLY TO THIS CAMPAIGN IN SERIES OF COUNTER-ADS. FRONT POINTED OUT THAT RIOS PROMOTED TO GENERAL BY "MOST ANTI-COMMUNIST CONGRESS IN HISTORY," HAD SERVED 30 YEARS IN ARMY AND HAD BEEN CHIEF OF STAFF ONLY EIGHT MONTHS PREVIOUSLY. BY THIS TEST, SO AD WENT, HE COULD NOT BE COMMUNIST. IN ANOTHER COUNTER-AD, FRONT CALLED COMMUNIST CHARGE A COALITION SUBTERFUGE TO SCARE PUBLIC AND CALLED ON VOTERS TO SAVE THEIR CHILDREN FROM ESCUADRON DE LA MUERTE AND CLANDESTINE CEMETARIES BY VOTING FOR RIOS.

COMMENT. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH US WITHIN LAST TWO WEEKS, BOTH LAUGERUD AND PAIZ HAVE STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT THEY KNOW FULL WELL RIOS IS NOT A COMMUNIST, ALTHOUGH EACH PROFESSED DOUBTS ABOUT "DANGEROUS TENDENCIES" OF SOME OF RIOS' SUPPORTERS. (RIOS HAS ALSO BEEN PRIVATELY APOLGETIC TO US FOR INCITING PASSIONS BY CALLING THE MLN THE "PARTY OF ORGANIZED VIOLENCE.") "COMMUNISMO" CHARGE OF PAIZ, LOW BLOW THAT IT IS, APPAEARS TO HAVE HELPED HIM. WE CONJECTURE THAT EVEN MORE BLATANT CHARGES AND INNENDOS OF COALITION MAY REDOUND MORE TO PAIZ'S BENEFIT THAN TO LAUGEUD. IF NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WANT CHANGE AND WHO PREFER RIOS ARE EITHER DUPED OR FRIGHTENED OUT OF VOTING FOR HIM BY COMMUNISM CHARGES, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR PAIZ, WHO IS PICTURING CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 GUATEM 01150 02 OF 02 272359Z

HIMSELF AS MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROADER AS SECOND BEST CHOICE, THAN FOR LAUGERUD, WHO IS BACKED BY RIGHT-WING MLN. COMMUNISM CHARGE HAS LOWERED THE LEVEL OF CAMPAIGN AND MAY CONTINUE TO PLAGUE POLITICAL SCENE AFTER ELECTIONS. END COMMENT.

RIBIO: "THE ARMY IS APOLITICAL": IN PRESS INTERVIEW PUBLISHED ON FEB 17 (SEE GUATEMALA 0960) AND IN FEBRUARY 22 TELEVISED SPEECH, MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL RUBIO DECLARED THAT ARMED FORCES WERE STRICTLY NEUTRAL IN POLITICAL CAMPAGIN, ALTHOUGH ALL THREE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE MILITARY OFFICERS. SPEAKING "WITH THE EXPRESS AUTHORITY OF PRESIDENT," RUBIO SAID ARMY WOULD PLAY NO ROLE IN ELECTIONS AND WOULD RESPECT POPULAR WILL AS EXPRESSED IN MARCH 3 BALLOTING. A MIDDLE-GRADE OFFICER TOLD US THAT DURING FEBRUARY RUBIO ALSO HELD BRIEFING SESSIONS FOR ENTIRE OFFICER CORPS TO DISCUSS POLITICAL CAMPAIGN, AND REPORTEDLY REITERATED ARMY'S APOLITICAL STANCE AND PROMISED THAT WHOEVER IS CHOSEN PRESIDENT ON MARCH 3 WILL HAVE SUPPORT OF ARMED FORCES.

COMMEND: RUBIO'S POSITION, WHICH HE HAS STATED TO US ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS, IS CLEARLY DESIGNED FOR BOTH PUBLIC CONSUMPTION AND FOR ARMY'S INTERNAL TRANQUILITY. IT IS CERTAINLY THE POSITION THAT THE ARMY TOP COMMAND AND LOWER OFFICER RANKS WOULD LIKE TO MAINTAIN. NEVERTHELESS, IF MARCH 3 ELECTIONS PRODUCE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL INSTABILITY, EITHER BECAUSE OF LAUGERUD VICTORY WON WITH GROSS FRAUD OR BECAUSE OF RIOS VICTORY WHICH GOG ATTEMPTS TO FRUSTRATE, ARMY WILL SURELY BE CALLED INTO PLAY AND WILL HAVE IMPORTANT VOICE IN DETERMINING IMMEDIATE POLITICAL FUTURE OF COUNTRY. RUBIO HIMSELF, NEXT TO PRESIDENT ARANA, WILL PROBABLY HAVE GREATEST VOICE IF SUCH A SITUATION ARISES. END COMMENT.

MUDSLINGING: DE LEON SCHLOTTER GETS HIS: ON FEBRUARY 15, OFFICIAL GOG STATEMENT APPEARED IN PRESS DIRECTED TO DCG LEADER LAMBASTING HIM FOR ATTACKING "GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL ARANA OSORIO, TO WHOM," ACCORDING TO STATEMENT, "HE OWES SOME FAVORS." STATEMENT POINTED OUT THAT DE LEON HAD OFFERED TO CONSULT WITH GOG ABOUT ANY ALLIANCE OR DEAL HE MIGHT MAKE IN EXCHANGE FOR AID IN KEEPING CONTROL OF DCG. FURTHER, HE ASKED GOVERNMENT NOT TO INSCRIBE ANY NEW PARTIES, NOR PERMIT DIVISION IN HIS OWN. ALSO, HE HAD PERSONALLY CONSULTED WITH GOVERNMENT OVER THE RIOS CANDIDACY, PROMISED TO CONDUCT "HIGH QUALITY" CAMPAIGN, AND "ACTUALLY ASKED FOR THE USE OF FORCE AGAINST HIS POLITICAL
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PAGE 03 GUATEM 01150 02 OF 02 272359Z

ENEMIES, WITH WHOM HE NOW MARCHES." IN ADDITION TO ALL THIS, DE LEON HAD ASKED FOR "SOME OTHER, MORE TANGIBLE THINGS."

COMMENT: REVELATIONS IN GOG'S STATEMENT, MANY OF WHICH REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, CENTER ON DE LEON'S EARLY AND MID 1973 DEALINGS WITH PRESIDENT ARANA TO KEEP CONTROL OF THE DCG IN FACE OF DISSIDENT PRESSURE AND COLOM ARQUETA'S MAY ASSAULT. THEY WERE PROBABLY INTENDED TO SOW DISSENSION IN FRONT'S RANKS AT CRUCIAL MOMENT, COMING JUST AFTER DCG'S LAST MINUTE DUMPING OF FURD CANDIDATES FOR DEPUTY IN GUATEMALA CITY AND DEPARTMENT ELECTORAL DISTRICTS (SEE A-27). CURIOUSLY, IT HAS GONE PRACTICALLY UNNOTICED, PROBABLY INDICATING THAT THE FRONT LEADERS HAVE DECIDED THAT SETTLING ACCOUNTS WILL HAVE TO WAIT IF VICTORY IS TO BE ACHIEVED ON MARCH 3. END COMMENT.

2. PRESS

RADIO STATION CLOSING: GOG, STATIONS BACK OFF: ON FEBRUARY 21, VICE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS BARILLAS TOLD PRESS THAT EIGHT RADIO STATIONS PREVIOUSLY THREATENED WITH CLOSURE WOULD SIMPLY BE WARNED TO GET THEIR LEGAL DOCUMENTS IN ORDER. ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWED TWO WEEKS OF ACTIVE AGITATION BY LEADERS OF GUATEMALAN PRESS COMMUNITY FOR GOG TO RESCIND ORDERS TO CLOSE STATIONS (SEE A-27). ALTHOUGH GOG BACKED OFF, IT SEEMS TO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED AT LEAST PART OF ITS AIMS IN THAT THE STATIONS INVOLVED AND OTHERS HAVE TONED DOWN ANTI-GOVERNMENT

ATTACKS.

HOSPITAL WORKERS BEGIN STRIKES: ON FEBRUARY 25, OVER
7,000 WORKERS AT TWO HEALTH MINISTRY HOSPITALS IN GUATEMALA
CITY BEGAN WORK STOPPAGES TO PRESS DEMANDS FOR WAGE INCREASES.
STRIKE HAS AFFECTED OPERATIONS FOR ONLY PART OF WORKDAY. IN
CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS STRIKES, DISPUTE HAS BEEN HANDLED IN
LOW-KEY FASHION BY BOTH GOG AND BY PRESS AND DOES NOT APPEAR
LIKELY TO RESULT IN MAJOR CONFRONTATION THAT WILL SPILL ONTO
POLITICAL SCENE.
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Message Attributes

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